

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

**Hearing on the Emergency Preparedness of the House and the
Evacuation of May 11, 2005**

Statement of Vance

Presented by: Thomas L. Kennedy
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee on House Administration; on behalf of Vance I would like to thank you for allowing us to participate in the hearing on the Emergency Preparedness of the House and the Evacuation of May 11, 2005.

The way business is transacted, how the government operates and how national defense is conducted have changed since 911. Additional world events have challenged us to prepare to manage previously unthinkable situations that may threaten an organization's and our government's future. Today's threats require the creation of an on-going, interactive process that serves to assure the continuation of an organization's or the government's core activities before, during, and most importantly, after a major crisis event.

Security today is an extraordinarily difficult challenge that requires a coordinated and focused effort. This new challenge goes beyond the mere emergency response plan or disaster management activities that we previously employed. We must act to reduce our vulnerabilities before they can be exploited to damage our Nation's critical infrastructures and ensure that, if attempted, disruptions are infrequent, minimal in duration, manageable, and cause the least possible damage and loss of life. It is no longer enough to draft a response plan that anticipates naturally, or accidentally, caused disaster or emergency scenarios. Plans must be developed to address possible intentional catastrophic events to include evacuation plans of large numbers of people, such as the U.S. Capital Evacuation Plan. However, a plethora of scientific studies and procedures to confirm the anecdotal assumptions of effectiveness of such plans does not exist.

I have not had the opportunity to examine the evacuation plan nor have I been privy to post May 11th assessments of its execution. Therefore, my comments will be focused on industry standards used to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency evacuations in response to disasters and my personal observations based on public information.

Large-scale evacuations in the United States, have historically been effective, successfully saved lives, and reduced the number of injuries associated with the hazard addressed. The U.S. Capital plan, I believe, is no exception.

Overall evaluation of emergency evacuation response operations should include the following six components and associated subcomponents:

Direction and control,
Notification and warning,
Traffic movement and control,
Sheltering, and
Re-entry
Training

Direction and control includes:

- The evacuation decision-making process. Is the decision to evacuate made by a single individual or are two or more individuals involved in the decision-making process? Are they armed with criteria to make that decision?
- The command, control, and coordination process. An overwhelming factor contributing to evacuation effectiveness is a high level of coordination and cooperation among the various elements resulting from an effective command structure. That is, the command structure is well understood, participants work well together, and emergency coordinators are empowered to make decisions. Is the command structure well understood? Who is the empowered to make decisions?
- The emergency communications; and emergency response activities. Two-Way Radios are the predominant method of emergency communications. However, radio communication issues are reported in many cases. This usually involves radios that were not on the same frequency or reception issues. Multiple forms of emergency communication, such as cell phones and pagers, are generally used

which often compensates for radio failures. It should be noted that jammed cell phone networks occur during emergencies.

- Are the emergency response personnel mobilized/notified in sufficient time to complete the evacuation? Evacuation Time Estimates are used to provide a tool for preplanning as well as protective action decision making. It identifies potential challenges to efficient evacuation. Are evacuation time estimates developed?

Notification and Warning

Multiple methods of notification are most efficient. These methods usually involve sirens, telephone, radio, public address (PA) systems, and office-to-office notification. Are multiple methods of notification utilized?

Shadow evacuations (people evacuating outside of the designated evacuation area), should have no significant impact on traffic or congregate care center capacity or on the efficiency of the evacuation, in general. However, public awareness of a hazard, knowledge of part of the evacuation procedures, and especially of alerting methods may contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of your evacuation.

Traffic Movement and Control

Are both vehicular and personnel movement carefully controlled? Are evacuees directed where to go as they exit structures?

Congregate Care Centers

Are public emergency shelters or congregate care centers included in the plan?

Re-Entry

Who decides when to return? In what order, etc.

Training

Training and exercises contribute to the effectiveness of evacuations. The most successful plans generally have been tested in a full-scale field exercise. This may not be feasible at the U.S. Capital, in which case incremental

testing would be advised. This is perhaps one area your committee should examine and review.

Other Factors

Cooperation from evacuees is repeatedly cited as contributing to safe, efficient, and effective evacuations. Conversely, individual misbehavior is attributed to less efficient evacuations. Specifically, individuals taking non-sanctioned actions are common issues reported as evacuation challenges. This reverts to training and exercises.

Shadow evacuations, as previously stated, are defined as evacuations by persons outside of any officially declared evacuation zone. If appropriate, have shadow evacuations been considered?

Advanced statistical methods, including regression and correlation analyses, can be used to scientifically analyze and identify key factors contributing to evacuation efficiency. The regression analyses for example, can identify that familiarity with your alerting methods or that the type of notification significantly contributed to the success of the evacuation. In addition, the analyses can identify factors that were statistically significant for a less efficient evacuation: i.e. number of injuries caused by the evacuation, people spontaneously evacuating before being told to do so, people refusing to evacuate, and vandalism.

A system should be considered to be devised by which all personnel can be accounted for quickly after the evacuation. This system can range from a simple telephone tree or taking advantage of new technologies which addresses this issue.

Finally, when time is a major consideration as is the case with evacuations associated with air assaults new and innovative ways to evacuate handicapped persons should be explored.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, based on information publicly available and considering whether issues were encountered in: decision-making, emergency communications, notification of response personnel and local officials, citizen action, traffic movement and control, and re-entry, it appears that the May 11th evacuation proceeded efficiently and effectively in terms of evacuee health and safety, security, and issues related to coordination, decision-making, and emergency response.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I welcome any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.